

## Airlines finally rid themselves of pointless safety rules

Airport security has become a mockery of what it used to be. In the past, travelers worried that security would allow some insane person to slip through and endanger the lives of others. Now, people worry that security will ask them to remove their shoes, stretch out their arms, remove their laptops from the case and detain them for further questioning because a pair of nail clippers was found in their carry-on. All the while, a hundred other passengers will be standing in line contemplating maniacal thoughts because the line is being held up when they have planes to catch.

There was always room for improvement in airport security, but the way in which rational, good-natured Americans decided to "improve" things after 9-11 just made things worse with rules that cause more irritation than peace of mind.

James M. Loy, the new head of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), is trying to do away with a number of the new rules so that air travel will not only be safe, but enjoyable again.

The first foolish rule was the ban against carrying coffee cups or any unsealed beverage through security checkpoints. The so-called threat was not that someone would pour hot coffee on the personnel to create a distraction, or even that the beverage may have contained some biological agent that could have caused twice the damage of Anthrax. No, the threat was that since everything a passenger took through a checkpoint had to be X-rayed, an unsealed beverage could spill and damage the expensive new X-ray machines located at security checkpoints.

"We can't afford to have those machines be damaged," said TSA spokeswoman Heather Rosenker in June. Apparently, nobody asked Rosenker why anyone would even think of putting unsealed beverages on a moving conveyor belt in the first place.

A second rule to be thrown out was the ban on nail clippers and eyelash curlers in carry-on luggage.

There are other idiotic rules that are currently being reviewed for their inconveniences to passengers.

The biggest among them is the random baggage check at the boarding gate. Put in place to randomly check carry-on items of passengers, even TSA agrees that the rule is bothersome and wants to do away with it.

In order to enter the terminal, travelers must pass through a metal detector and hand over carry-on luggage for X-ray screening. At that point, passengers are subject to a random check of carry-on luggage. The random check at the boarding gate is superfluous and time-consuming. If luggage has already been screened by an X-ray, the human eye probably will not catch anything new.

However, as long as this rule remains valid, it is only fair that inspection workers should recheck all that they unpack out of the luggage.

Another major rule that is on its way out is the 30-minute rule which keeps passengers flying in and out of Reagan National Airport in Washington D.C. from leaving their seats 30 minutes prior to landing and takeoff. With armed sky marshals assigned to many flights, reinforced cockpit doors and improved screening procedures, there is no point in confining passengers to their seats. If a terrorist is dead-set on hijacking a plane, he will attempt to do it regardless of whether he is allowed or not allowed to do so 30 minutes prior to landing or takeoff.

Possibly the only inane rule that was done away with that was not so unreasonable were the two questions one is always asked when checking luggage at the ticket counter: "Have your bags been in your possession at all times?" and "Has anyone unknown to you asked you to carry anything on board this plane?"

The questions were deemed unnecessary because they were rhetorical and no one in their right mind would admit to either of them out of fear of the consequences. As inefficient as they were, the questions had a sort of innocent approach in that it assumed that people were honest enough to answer the questions truthfully. With all the turmoil and chaos that was taking place in the world, it was as if ticket agents still believed in the goodness of man.

The times have changed, the circumstances are different, and airport security has had to adapt to fit the needs of today's traveler. It is far from perfect, but the TSA is heading in the right direction by doing away with stupid rules that have made air travel a hassle. Until then, passengers might as well get used to stretching out their arms, taking off their shoes and removing their laptops from their cases.



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## Face the consequences

### Student should lose MSC position for lying to police



RICHARD BRAY

Memorial Student Center (MSC) Council Executive Vice President Chris Duke lied to police and wasted the time of two police departments, but he has yet to face disciplinary action from either the police or the MSC. As an embarrassment to Texas A&M, Duke continues to hold a leadership position in the MSC.

Shortly after midnight Oct. 8, Duke called the Corpus Christi Police

Department and told them a Hispanic man with a gun had approached him outside his apartment in College Station. Duke claimed the man forced him to drive to Corpus Christi, where he passed out after the man pointed the gun at him. Duke said his laptop, credit cards and cash were stolen.

The College Station Police Department (CSPD) said the story was false Oct. 18.

The CSPD said it would not press charges against Duke for making a false report, which would be a Class B misdemeanor, comparable to driving while intoxicated or possessing less than two ounces of marijuana. MSC Council President Barry Hammond declined to comment and no disciplinary actions have been announced.

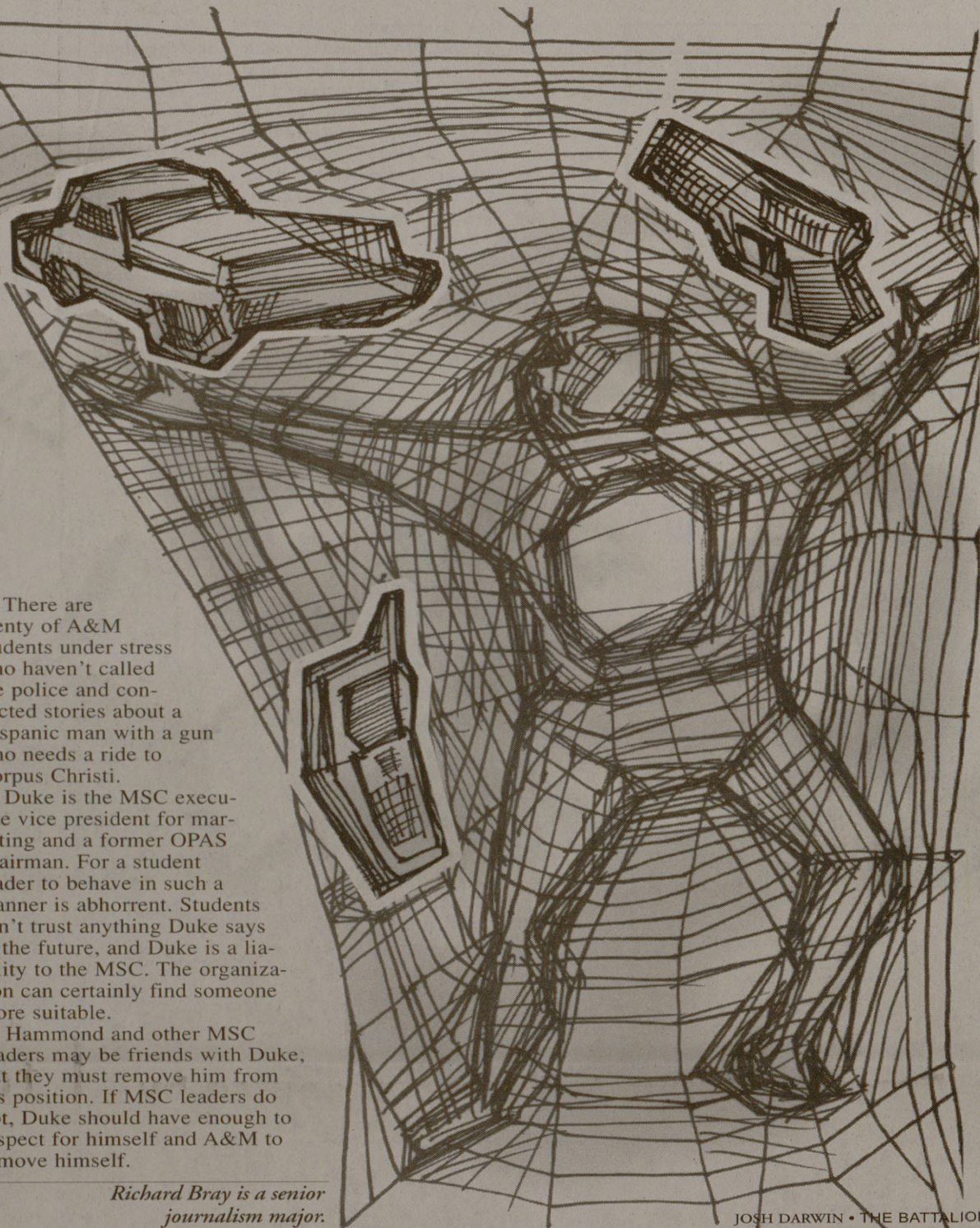
Duke endangered others by forcing officers to spend their time sorting out his lies rather than protecting other citizens. It doesn't matter if Duke was under a great deal of personal pressure and stress, as Jim James, Duke's attorney, said.

There are plenty of A&M students under stress who haven't called the police and concocted stories about a Hispanic man with a gun who needs a ride to Corpus Christi.

Duke is the MSC executive vice president for marketing and a former OPAS chairman. For a student leader to behave in such a manner is abhorrent. Students can't trust anything Duke says in the future, and Duke is a liability to the MSC. The organization can certainly find someone more suitable.

Hammond and other MSC leaders may be friends with Duke, but they must remove him from his position. If MSC leaders do not, Duke should have enough to respect for himself and A&M to remove himself.

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JOSH DARWIN • THE BATTALION

## Limits on malpractice suit awards would benefit patients, doctors

Several weeks ago, Mississippi Gov. Ronnie Musgrove signed legislation placing caps on the amount that can be awarded to plaintiffs in medical malpractice lawsuits.



LAUREL FRANCK

According to The Associated Press, the bill, which takes effect on Jan. 1, sets caps for pain and suffering damages at \$500,000, increasing to \$750,000 by 2011 and \$1 million by 2017. This legislation is a small but important step in fighting the plague of frivolous malpractice lawsuits that has been sweeping the nation. This escalating problem is so serious that it has caught the attention of President Bush.

According to *The Corpus Christi Caller Times*, Bush recently said, "Because premiums go up or ... lawsuits are threatening doctors, it means some of the docs can't get insurance coverage, which means they no longer want to provide care. And that hurts people."

While the legislation in Mississippi is an example of positive action being taken to solve the problem, more action still needs to be taken, and quickly.

Junk lawsuits not only affect physicians, but their patients as well. The American Medical Association lists Texas as one of about a dozen states involved in a malpractice insurance crisis.

Fifty-two percent of all Texas physicians had medical malpractice claims filed against them in 2000, which is about twice the national average. As the Houston branch of Citizens Against Lawsuit Abuse says on its Web site, if you practice medicine in Texas, "... it is not a matter of whether you will be sued, but how often and for how much money."

This rampant and outrageous abuse of the judicial system has resulted in many problems for doctors. The number of companies offering malpractice coverage in Texas has dropped from 17 to four since 1999, according to CALA. Premiums have climbed into the triple digits this year, and many physicians are scrambling to obtain and afford coverage.

"It's not uncommon for doctors in high-risk specialties such as trauma surgery, emergency medicine, and obstetrics to pay more than \$100,000 annually for coverage," according to the CALA Web site.

Physicians are now often unable to recruit partners and patients are losing doctors who could provide invaluable care.

According to Dr. Christine Canterbury, an OB/GYN and contributor to the *Caller Times*, "Physicians are leav-

ing the state or retiring early because their malpractice insurance is unbearably high. Some are choosing not to practice high-risk medicine, such as obstetrics and neurosurgery."

Therefore, victims of the effects of malpractice lawsuit abuse are often children, newborns, and patients suffering from life-threatening diseases.

Most frustrating is the fact that, as stated by Texas Attorney General John Cornyn, "Eight out of 10 medical malpractice lawsuits in Texas result in no payment being made by the doctor because there is no fault."

Junk lawsuits cause physicians to spend money on legal expenses and valuable time in court instead of the examination room. This flood of lawsuits must be stopped, and it must be stopped now.

Caps on verdicts awarded by juries should be the first step taken by Texas lawmakers. According to CALA, California took this step in 1975 and has been able to maintain a stable market. Another solution to this ongoing problem would be to pass legislation requiring the plaintiffs to pay for legal fees and work time lost by the physician if there is no fault found. This would be a powerful deterrent for lawyers and clients who pursue these frivolous cases.

Unless a claim has true merit and there is no doubt that gross negligence on the part of the physician could be proven, the potential plaintiff would be the only one paying the often expensive price.

If judges would simply throw these ludicrous claims out of court, they would be prevented from getting so far in the first place. Recently, according to the *Caller Times*, Thomas J. Henry, a Corpus Christi lawyer, was fined \$50,000 because he claimed that his client had been harmed by a drug that had never even been prescribed. This waste of time and money could have been easily avoided if the facts had been thoroughly reviewed beforehand.

Gov. Rick Perry has proposed a slate of medical liability reforms and other measures designed to close the loopholes, curb lawsuit abuse and control medical malpractice insurance costs, according to the *Caller Times*. If Texas lawmakers don't take charge and seriously consider implementing some significant changes, doctors will continue to be terrified of being on the receiving end of another lawsuit, and Texans will continue to lose excellent physicians and health care.

Laurel Franck is a senior biomedical science and English major.

### MAIL CALL

#### Boycott notices are not threatening

In response to Rich Bray's Oct. 23 column.

"Threat" is such a harsh word. Boycotts are a perfectly acceptable, normal, legal, peaceful and historical way of protesting. The Coalition for Life sent letters to businesses which are Planned Parenthood supporters to tell them that their names will be on a boycott list if they do not pull their funding. This is not a threat, but a notice. Think of it like this: a credit card company does not threaten people to pay up, they give them notices that the bill is due. The Coalition gave notices to the people that they will be on a boycott list if they continue to support Planned Parenthood. This is the choice of the business.

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#### Many Chinese happy about Jiang's visit

We are graduate students from the mainland of China. We do not understand the article "Group to protest Chinese president's visit." Most Chinese people living in College Station were cheered by the news that President Jiang visit TAMU. But this article seems to intentionally ignore most Chinese people's feeling, and focuses on how groups like Falun Gong, will protest the visit.

In fact, Falun gong, the anti-scientific cult, has caused a lot of tragedies in the mainland of China. Most Chinese people dislike it and avoid it.

Another bad thing is that the visit's schedule was printed on the Chinese national flag. It seriously hurt the dignity of China.

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